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***Il venditore d'antichità*
by Vincenzo Capobianchi (1880):
possibly the most scholarly work
of the neo-Pompeian painting**

François de CALLATAÏ¹



Fig. 1. Vincenzo Capobianchi, *Il venditore d'antichità*, 1880, oil on canvas, 65.4 x 43 cm
(Staffoli [Pisa], private collection – courtesy of Phidias Gallery, Reggio Emilia)

¹ The author would like to express his warmest thanks to Céline Ben Amar, Dimitri Laboury, Valentino Nizzo, Simona Sanchirico and Eugène Warmenbol who provided excellent advices and several identifications (see text). He also expresses his deep gratitude to Antonio Esposito, owner of the gallery Phidias Antiques (Reggio Emilia), who was very kind to provide a high resolution image of the painting, and to Prof. Anna Lina Morelli (University of Bologna) for providing a copy of the unique article published on Capobianchi in the periodical *Latina Gens*. Finally, he is much indebted to Stephen Sack who kindly revised the English.

Vincenzo Capobianchi (1836-1928): painter, art dealer and numismatist

Very little has been published so far on Vincenzo Capobianchi (fig. 2),² a key figure in several respects who is still awaiting a true study.³



Fig. 2. Vincenzo Capobianchi, *Selfportrait*
(see CARACCILO DEL LEONE, “Un artista e scienziato...”, p. 21)

The family Capobianchi (or Capobiancho) originated from Benevent and moved during the 17th c. to Agnani. Vincenzo Capobianchi, however, was born in Rome on January 19, 1836 as the son of Tommaso Capobianchi, an antiquarian residing at

² The unique – and disappointing – article about Capobianchi is: M. CARACCILO DEL LEONE, “Un artista e scienziato del sec XIX, Vincenzo Capobianchi”, *Latina Gens* 12-13 (Jan.-Febr. 1934), p. 19-27. See also V. SPRETI, *Enciclopedia storico-nobiliare italiana* 1, Rome, 1928, p. 502; G. BERARDI, “Pittori archeologi nella Roma postunitaria e il signor Goupil”, in E. QUERCI and S. DI CARO (eds.), *Alma Tadema e la nostalgia dell’antico*, Milan, 2007, p. 105 and S. SPINAZZÈ, “Artisti-antiquari a Roma tra la fine dell’Ottocento e l’inizio del Novecento: lo studio e la galleria di Attilio Simonetti”, *Studiolo* 8 (2010), p. 114 and 119.

³ His numismatic collection is now kept at the Archivio di Stato di Roma (see V. SPAGNUOLO, “Una raccolta di monete nell’Archivio di Stato di Roma”, *Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato* 29/2 (1969), p. 412-439 (*non vidi*; see the review in *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 66 [1970], p. 211). It is likely that the rich correspondence evoked by Caracciolo del Leone 1934 is also kept there.

n.152 Via del Babuino,⁴ and Elisa Lorini. After growing up in such an artistic milieu, Vincenzo studied under Tommaso Minardi (1787-1871)⁵ at the Roman Accademia di San Luca, with practical drawing executed among the rich collections of the Vatican, where he developed a passion for Roman antiquities.

Vincenzo Capobianchi rapidly became acquainted with many painters, especially the Spanish ones who stayed in Rome and who greatly benefited from their unique connections with rich collectors to sell their paintings.⁶ In particular, he developed a great friendship with the Catalan painter Marià Josep Bernat Fortuny i Marsal (1838-1874),⁷ better known in Italy as Mariano Fortuny, who died at an early age and was influential on Capobianchi's style as a painter (the "fortunismo"). Among other anecdotes, we are told that, on May 1868, Fortuny exchanged with him his painting *The Collector of Prints* (*El colleccionista d'estampes*) against a Sardinian rifle, and that Capobianchi immediately sold the painting, which is now property of the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), to Adolphe Goupil & Cie (Paris).⁸ He also resold to Goupil & Agnot paintings of another Spanish painter in Rome, the Orientalist Moragas Torras (1837-1906).⁹ It is Adolphe Goupil (1806-1893) who encouraged him to produce delicate paintings, with no trace of roughness, to please the rich customers of Paris.¹⁰ As

⁴ M. de TYSKIEWICZ, *Memories of an old collector*, London, 1895, p.40: "In the Via del Babuino lived old Capobianchi. He never had a large number of works of art at once, but all were good, and therefore sold rapidly" (trad. from the French original by A. Lang).

⁵ E. OVIDI, *Tommaso Minardi e la sua scuola*, Rome, 1902, p.146.

⁶ For example, Tomàs Moragas Torras who sold his works to Agnot & Goupil through Capobianchi (see E. DIZY CASO, *Les orientalistes de l'École espagnole*, Grenada, 1997, p.178).

⁷ On Fortuny, still see J.-C. DAVILLIER, *Fortuny, sa vie, son œuvre, sa correspondance*, Paris, 1876. Capobianchi is quoted as an artist painter as well as an expert in antiques in Fortuny's testament (1874).

⁸ J.-C. DAVILLIER, *Fortuny, sa vie, son œuvre, sa correspondance, avec cinq dessins inédits en fac-similé et deux eaux-fortes originales*, Paris, 1875, p.34.

⁹ DIZY CASO, *Les orientalistes...*, p.178.

¹⁰ SPINAZZÈ, "Artisti-antiquari...", p.105. The Maison Goupil, founded by Jules-Adolphe Goupil in 1829, had branches in many cities and a host of artists under exclusive contract who were required to produce in a formatted style. Among the Italians, we find Edoardo Dalbono (1841-1915), the famous portraitist Giovanni Boldini (1842-1931 – another student of Tommaso Minardi), Giuseppe De Nittis (1846-1884), Francesco Paolo Michetti (1851-1929), Antonio Mancini (1852-1930), as well as Mariano Fortuny. On Goupil, see H. LAFONT-COUTURIER, "La maison Goupil ou la notion d'œuvre originale remise en question", *La Revue de l'Art* 112 (1996/2), p.59-69 or L. LOMBARDI, "The role played by art merchants and the success of the Goupil 'stable'", in L. LOMBARDI, *From Realism to Art Nouveau*, New York, 2009, p.38-40.

a consequence, some of his opera as *Le salon Rothschild à Paris*¹¹ (*sic*) were painted at the demand of French collectors.

Gifted for drawing and with an excellent sense of colours, the “modestissimo” Capobianchi was slow however to produce, being able to make only three or four paintings a year. We are told that this is the reason which prompted him to eventually put an end to his career as a painter. He remains today a much neglected artist for whom no comprehensive catalogue has been produced and whose fame is likely to grow in the future.¹² Among his paintings dealing with classical antiquity, one may cite: *Gara dell'arco nell'antica Roma*,¹³ an indoor scene of archery.

By the last decade of the 19th c., Capobianchi had ceased to paint and devoted himself to dealing in art and numismatics (an activity he was already involved with). As a coin expert, he was already very active in the 1880s before associating himself to Giuseppe Giacomini – creating the house Vendite Giacomini & C., which for a while dominated the market – and later on, from 1901 onwards, with the firm Corvisieri & Cie. In particular, the catalogue he wrote in 1882 of the coin collection belonging to Luigi De Poletti was extremely influential in his growing interest for numismatics.¹⁴ As indicated by Table 1, Capobianchi devoted much of his time producing catalogues for sales of coins and antiquities, an occupation which culminated with the two sales devoted to the Borghese properties.

Table 1. Sale's catalogues published by Vincenzo Capobianchi

- Vincenzo Capobianchi, *Catalogo delle monete greche, aes grave, monete della repubblica e degli imperatori romani, componenti la collezione di Luigi Depoletti, asta del 6 marzo 1882* (Rome, Tip. Artero, 1882).
- Vincenzo Capobianchi, *Catalogo delle monete italiane medio-evali e moderne appartenute a Luigi Depoletti, numismatico, asta del 27 febbraio 1882* (Rome, Tip. Artero, 1882).
- Vincenzo Capobianchi, *Catalogue des objets d'art et de haute curiosité : composant la collection de M. le chevalier Attilio Simonetti, artiste peintre, et dont la vente aura lieu a Rome, Palais Theodoli, Via del Corso n°378, le 16 avril 1883 et jours suivants à deux heures sous la direction de M. Vincenzo Capobianchi, artiste peintre et Antiquaire* (Rome, Impr. A. Befani, 1883).¹⁵

¹¹ CARACCILO DEL LEONE, “Un artista e scienziato...”, p. 23, n° V.

¹² Notices about Capobianchi in major artist dictionaries are particularly deceptive. See *Benezit Dictionary of Artists*, 3, Paris, 2006, p. 338 (with not even his dates of birth and death) or *Thieme & Becker*, 5, Leipzig, 1911, p. 541.

¹³ 41,7 x 78,8 cm, 1881, Brighton, Royal Pavilion, Libraries & Museums, Brighton & Hove, Inv. FA000050 [given by A. Hay, 1952].

¹⁴ CARACCILO DEL LEONE, “Un artista e scienziato...”, p. 24.

¹⁵ On Attilio Simonetti, see now SPINAZZÈ, “Artisti-antiquari...”, p. 103-122.

- Giuseppe Giacomini and Vincenzo Capobianchi, *Catalogo delle monete consolari e monete papali componenti la collezione di Alessandro dei Principi Ruspoli la cui vendita al pubblico incanto avrà luogo in Roma nelle sede della Società* (Rome, 1886).
- Giuseppe Giacomini and Vincenzo Capobianchi, *Catalogue des objets d'art et d'ameublement qui garnissent le grand appartement au premier étage du palais du Prince Borghese à Rome* (Rome, Imprimerie Editrice Romana, 1892).
- Vincenzo Capobianchi, *Catalogue des marbres antiques et des objets d'art formant le Musée du pavillon de l'horloge, la Villa Borghese (Place de Sienne) à Rome, provenant de l'héritage des Princes Borghese et des objets d'art du Moyen Âge, de la Renaissance et des armes appartenant à M. le comte Grégoire Stroganoff et...* (Rome, 1893).

As an expert in ancient coins, Vincenzo Capobianchi is also remembered as a good numismatist whose publications were long highly praised,¹⁶ especially his interest for ancient weights and weight-standards. He is remembered as the first to have classified the coinage of the Roman medieval senate.¹⁷ He appears for the first time in 1892 as a member of the *Società Italiana di Numismatica*, founded in 1890, and is presented then as “Cav(aliere) Prof(essore) Vincenzo Capobianchi”.¹⁸ His numismatic publications (see below Table 2), all of them of real magnitude and interest, are dated between 1887 and 1904 at a time Capobianchi was in his fifties and sixties and not active anymore as a painter, but we know that he developed a strong passion for numismatics well before since he was already presented as an accomplished and generous collector in 1882,¹⁹ and was collecting seals as early as in 1872.²⁰

¹⁶ CARACCILO DEL LEONE, “Un artista e scienziato...”, p. 24: “...i più grandi cultori di studi numismatici d'Italia e stranieri si rivolgevano a lui per consigli e per aiuti, e tanti lo veneravano comme loro maestro. Sarebbe a questo proposito interessante pubblicare le lettere dirette al Capobianchi da tanti e tanti insigni cultori di numismatica e di antiquaria, di storia e di araldica, di arte in genere e di pittura”. Unfortunately, nothing is said about the location of this rich correspondence (but see *supra*, note 2).

¹⁷ See E. MARTINORI, *Annali della zecca di Roma. Urbano V... Giovanni XXIII*, 1917, p. 1-2: “Di questa seria, che chiameremo Senatoria, si è occupato con una grande corredo di notizie e documenti il chiaro numismatico Vincenzo Capobianchi che è stato il primo a dare una guida per l'ordinamento di quelle monete”.

¹⁸ See *Rivista Italiana di Numismatica* 5 (1892), p. 538. And he was still presented as such in 1917 (*RIN* 30 [1917], p. 410) when the *RIN* stopped to publish the list of its members.

¹⁹ See O. VITALINI, “Alcune parole sul grosso di Manfredi II Lancia”, *Bullettino di numismatica e sfragistica per la storia d'Italia* 1 (1882), p. 122 (“... un nummo da quell mio amico Vincenzo Capobianchi, di cui da questo seggio trop'elevato per me, manifestai la sua valentia numismatica e la sua grande fortuna in rinvenire inedite monete”), also p. 284.

²⁰ O. VITALINI, “Di un sigillo di Mattia Varano da Camerino”, *Periodico di numismatica e sfragistica per la storia d'Italia* 4 (1872), p. 317 (“Dall'egregio e mio illustre amico Vincenzo

Table 2. Numismatic papers by Vincenzo Capobianchi

- Vincenzo Capobianchi, “Origine della zecca del senato romano nel XII secolo”, *Bullettino di Numismatica e Sfragistica per la Storia d’Italia* 3 (1887), 61-85.
- Vincenzo Capobianchi, “Nuove osservazioni sopra alcune monete battute dai Papi nel contado venesino e d’Avignone”, *Rivista Italiana di Numismatica* 3 (1890), 217-231.
- Vincenzo Capobianchi, “Pesi proporzionali dedotti dalla libra romana, merovingia e di Carlomagno”, *Rivista Italiana di Numismatica* 5 (1892), 79-114.
- Vincenzo Capobianchi, “Appunti per servire all’ordinamento delle monete coniate dal Senato Romano dal 1184 al 1439 e degli stemmi primitivi del Comune de Roma”, *Archivio della Reale Società romana di storia patria* 18 (1895), 417-445 and 19 (1896), 75-123.
- Vincenzo Capobianchi, “Le immagini simboliche e gli stemmi di Roma”, *Archivio della Reale Società romana di storia patria* 19 (1896), 347-423.
- Vincenzo Capobianchi, “Il denaro pavese e il suo corso in Italia nel XII secolo”, *Rivista Italiana di Numismatica* 9 (1896), 21-60.
- Vincenzo Capobianchi, “Les Caroli Pondus conservés en Italie”, *Mélanges d’archéologie et d’histoire* 20 (1900), 43-77.
- Vincenzo Capobianchi, “Le origini del Peso Gallico”, *Archivio della Reale Società romana di storia patria* 26-27 (1903-1904), 5-20 and 80-108.

To these published papers, one should add an unpublished manuscript entitled: “Il Marco. Unità di peso della Germania preistorica, suo ragguaglio in soldi romani d’oro, nelle composizioni delle antiche leggi germaniche”.²¹ Beside numismatics, Capobianchi had other strong involvements. Passionate for the story of Rome, he was elected in 1885 as a member of the Deputazione romana di storia patria,²² and he kept a close eye on ongoing excavations in Rome.²³ A collector of musical instruments,²⁴ he married Donna Emilia Gomez Homen, with whom he had one daughter (Luigia).

Capobianchi di Roma, che l’ebbe a Milano, ho acquistato un bel suggello benissimo conservato di 25 millim. di diametro...”). The same year, he is mentioned as the author of an archaeological drawing: see G.B. De Rossi, “Teca di bronzo figurata”, *Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana* 2/3 (1872), p. 8.

²¹ CARACCILO DEL LEONE, “Un artista e scienziato...”, p. 29.

²² *Bullettino di numismatica e sfragistica per la storia d’Italia* (1885), p. 150 (elected with 9 voices).

²³ See R.A. LANCIANI, L. MALVEZZI CAMPEGGI, and C. BUZZETTI (eds.), *Storia degli scavi di Roma e notizie intorno le collezioni romane di antichità* 6, Rome, 2000, p. 371.

²⁴ See E. FERRARI BORASSI, M. FRACASSI, and G. GREGORI (eds.), *Strumenti, musica e ricerca: atti del Convegno internazionale, Cremona, 28-29 ottobre 1994*, Cremona, 2000, p. 238.

Living on Piazza Barberini (nr. 47),²⁵ Capobianchi who is repeatedly described as “modestissimo” by his biographer, must have lived a comfortable life, enriched by his business activities as an art dealer. Always helpful to his many friends, he died in Rome on 8 September 1928, having lost his mind long before.²⁶

Il venditore d'antichità: a subgroup of the neo-Pompeian painting

As for the other paintings of Capobianchi, being Pompeian or not, we don't know the circumstances which surrounded the creation of *Il venditore d'antichità*, also sometimes called: *A Pompeian antique dealer*.²⁷ Is it an explicit reference to his father Tommaso who is officially recorded in some British guidebooks for Rome as a “seller of antiquities”?²⁸ The painting, which was auctioned twice in England in the 1990s,²⁹ is now the property of an Italian collector and has been recently shown at Naples as one of the highlights of the exhibition *Alma-Tadema e la nostalgia dell'antico* (19 oct. 2007–31 March 2008).³⁰

Before focusing on the painting itself and to detail the various antiquities which are here reproduced together, a word should be said on the Pompeian historical painting – a genre affected by a strong revival of interest in recent times – and the so far uncommented subgroup tentatively named here: “sellers of antiquities”.

Only recently declassified as “art bourgeois” or “art pompier”, and vilified as insipid academism promoting reactionary values, historical paintings which proliferated in the last decades before the World War I are largely rediscovered now by the large audience and partly rehabilitated by professional art historians, while avidly desired by rich collectors. This trend is not only affecting the *coryphaei* of the genre as Lourens (better than Lawrence, the anglicized form of his Dutch first name) Alma-Tadema (1836–1912) or Henryk Siemiradzky (1843–1902) but has also

²⁵ See A. BOTHE (ed.), *Adressbuch von bildenden Künstlern der Gegenwart*, Munich, 1898, p. 40.

²⁶ CARACCILO DEL LEONE, “Un artista e scienziato...”, p. 26.

²⁷ PH. HOOK and M. POLTIMORE, *Popular 19th Century Painting: a Dictionary of European Genre Painters*, Woodbridge (Suffolk), 1986, p. 217.

²⁸ See J. MURRAY (ed.), *A Handbook of Rome and its Environs*, 9th ed., London, 1869, p. XXVIII.

²⁹ See Sotheby's (London), 27 Nov. 1991, N° 328 (see catalogue, p. 230 - 48 cm x 65.0 cm [18 7/8 in x 25 5/8 in]) – sold for \$13,437 = Philipps (London), 21 July 1992, N° 268 (see catalogue, p. 96 - 50 cm x 65.5 cm [19 5/8 in x 25 3/4 in]) – sold for \$ 38,300 (see Artprice.com – Oct. 2013).

³⁰ See QUERCI and DE CARO (eds.), *Alma Tadema e la nostalgia dell'antico*.

prompted a growing interest for a constellation of less famous painters who were acclaimed in their times and deeply forgotten from then onwards.³¹

In Italy, the classical revival was not politically neutral but strongly linked with the Risorgimento.³² As argued by Luna Figurelli, Italian painters interested with the classical revival were divided in two groups: on one side, those who – as most the others outside Italy – tried to please the taste of the wealthy upper class attracted by Roman grandeur, and on another side, those less numerous who recreated a more banal image of the past, painting the daily life of common people, working hard as gladiators or artisans. It turns out that Neapolitan painters as Domenico Morelli or Camillo Miola belong to that second category. The Calabrese Enrico Salfi, native of Cosenza but who long lived in Naples, went even further in his depiction of a dark antiquity. Figurelli is probably right to see in that painting a political manifesto at a time, shortly after the Italian reunification, minds were obsessed with the *questione meridionale*.

The Pompeian genre was adopted by dozens of Italian painters, several of them specializing in this kind of paintings with its near photographic accuracy.³³ Here is a tentative list of these painters classified in the order of their birthdates:

³¹ Among the recent signs of this revival, see the following exhibition's catalogues: M. LIVERSIDGE and C. EDWARDS, *Imagining Rome: British Artists and Rome in the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1996; G.C. ASCIONE, "Pompei e il mondo classico nella produzione pittorica napoletana tra 'accademia' e 'storia'", in A. D'AMBROSIO, P.G. GUZZO, and M. MASTROROBERTO (eds.), *Storie da un'eruzione. Pompei Ercolano Oplontis*, Milan, 2003, p. 84-93; QUERCI and DE CARO (eds.), *Alma Tadema e la nostalgia dell'antico*, Milan, 2007; D. MATTEONI (ed.), *L'Ottocento elegante. Arte in Italia nel segno di Fortuny 1860-1890*, Rovigo, 2011; V. GÉRARD-POWELL (ed.), *Désirs et volupté à l'époque victorienne*, Paris, 2013.

³² On this, see now the recent works of L. FIGURELLI: "Il 'revival' classico nella pittura italiana del XIX secolo: 'Umbertini' e 'Spartachisti'", in G. BARONE and L. FIGURELLI (eds.), *Antico e moderno: laboratorio di ricerche trasversali*, Palermo, 2007, p. 55-67, and: "Italian classical revival painters and the 'Southern question'", in S. HALES and J. PAUL (eds.), *Pompei in the Public Imagination. From its Rediscovery to Today*, Oxford, 2011, p. 137. For a non political role of British Victorian painters, see R.J. BARROW, *The Use of Classical Art and Literature by Victorian Painters 1860-1912: Creating Continuity with the Traditions of High Art*, Lewiston (NY), 2007.

³³ On this see G.P. LANDOW, "Victorianized Romans: images of Rome in Victorian painting", *Browning Institute Studies* 12 (1984), p. 29-51; C. SISI, "Umbertini in toga", *Artista. Critica dell'Arte in Toscana*, Florence, 1993, p. 174-189; R. CASSANELLI, "Pompeii in nineteenth century painting", in R. CASSANELLI, P.L. CIAPARELLI, E. COLLE and M. DAVID, *Houses and Monuments in Pompeii. The works of Fausto and Felice Niccolini*, Los Angeles, 2002, p. 40-47, J. HARRIS, "Victorian in togas", in *Pompeii awakened*, London, 2007, p. 192-210 or S. GOLDBILL, *Victorian culture and classical antiquity. Art, opera, fiction and the proclamation of modernity*, Princeton, 2011.

Roberto Bompiani (1821-1908), Domenico Morelli (1823-1901), Federico Maldarelli (1826-1893), Cesare Mariani (1826-1901),³⁴ Amos Cassioli (1832-1891), Francesco Netti (1832-1894), Raffaele Gianetti (1832-1916), Giuseppe Sciuti (1834-1911), Luigi Crosio (1835-1915), Luigi Bazzani (1836-1927), Cesare Maccari (1840-1919), Camillo Miola (1840-1919), Giuseppe Boschetto (1841-1918), Anatolio Sciffoni (1841-1884), Giuseppe Barbaglia (1841-1910), Prosper Piatti (1842-1902), Attilio Simonetti (1843-1925), Raffaele Sorbi (1844-1931), Giovanni Muzzioli (1854-1894), sometimes called “the Italian Alma-Tadema”, Erulo Erolì (1854-1916), Carlo Bonato Minella (1855-1878), Ettore Forni (? – *floruit* 1880-1920), Enrico Salfi (1857-1935), Henrique Bernardelli (1857-1936), Emilio Vasarri (1862-1928), Giulio Bargellini (1869-1936), Gaetano D’Agostino (1873-1914), Guglielmo Zocchi (1874-1957), and Alessandro Pigna (1883-1903). Some of them entirely devoted themselves to the recreation of the antique; others just ventured once or twice. Taken together, however, they created hundreds of paintings absorbed by a demanding market for such fantasies.³⁵

It is no surprise if Vincenzo Capobianchi, who was born in 1836 – at the peak of the tide, the same year as Alma-Tadema – and grew up among the antique shop of his father Via del Babuino, endorsed the general and international movement for producing picturesque scenes of daily Roman life.

What is also not surprising but more peculiar and largely Italian is his propensity to paint Roman antique dealers, as with *Il venditore d’antichità*, or Roman artisans in their workshop as with *Il fabbricante di vasi* (fig. 3).³⁶

Capobianchi was not the first to illustrate such a scene. It is likely that *Une marchande de bijoux à Pompéi* was painted before 1880 by Gustave Clarence Rodolphe Boulanger (1824-1888) (fig. 4). The painting *The mask seller. A Roman street scene* was executed in 1875 by Cesare Mariani (1826-1901) (fig. 5),³⁷ while *The seller of amphorae in Pompei* by Enrico Salfi (1857-1935) is dated in 1880 (fig. 6).³⁸ Other paintings are

³⁴ Cesare Mariani is the father of the archaeologist Lucio Mariani (1869-1924) (information kindly provided by Valentino Nizzo).

³⁵ See G. MORI, “Pompei dopo Pompei”, in F. PESANDO, M. BUSSAGLI and G. MORI, *Pompei. La pittura*, Milan, 2003, p. 33-47.

³⁶ See illustration in CARACCILO DEL LEONE, “Un artista e scienziato...”, p. 25. A painting entitled “Roman potters” was sold by Christie’s (London) on 20 March 1997, nr. 227 (29.8 x 40.6 cm).

³⁷ This painting has been recently auctioned by Rowley Fine Art Auctioneers and Valuers in February 23rd, 2010, lot 524.

³⁸ See T. SICOLI, “Enrico Salfi”, *Il quotidiano della domenica*, 18 Oct. 2009, p. 18-19. CASSANELLI, “Pompeii in nineteenth century painting”, p. 47, footnote 10: “Such as *Venditori di anfore a Pompei* by Enrico Salfi (Milan, Galleria d’Arte Moderna), where incongruous Greek vases and black figures are sold next to the amphorae...”

likely to have been produced shortly after 1880 as with *The little luxury* (fig. 7) of Stefan Bakalowicz (1857-1947) or *At the bazaar* of Emilio Vaserri (1862-1928) (fig. 8).



Fig. 3. Vincenzo Capobianchi, *Il fabbricante di vasi*
(CARACCILO DEL LEONE, "Un artista e scienziato...", p. 25)



Fig. 4. Gustave Clarence Rodolphe Boulanger, *Une marchande de bijoux à Pompéi*,
40.6 x 25.1 cm (private coll.)

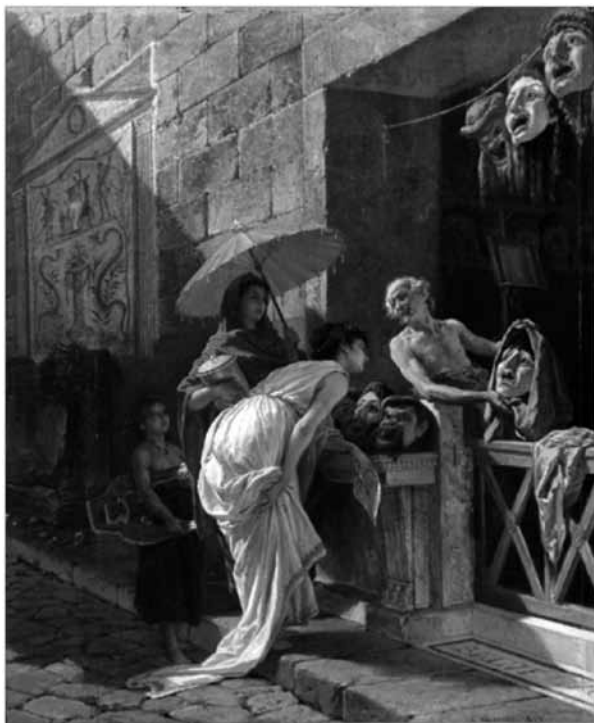


Fig. 5. Cesare Mariani, *The mask seller. A Roman street scene*, 1875, 40.5 x 34 cm (private coll.)

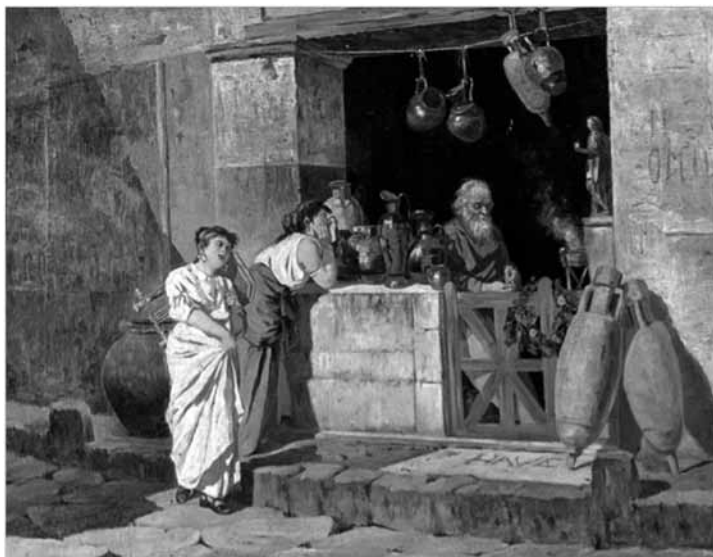


Fig. 6. Enrico Salfi, *Il venditore di anfore a Pompei*, 1880, Milan (© Galleria d'Arte Moderna)



Fig. 7. Stefan Bakalowicz, *Little luxury*, no date but likely to be after 1880, oil on canvas, 51 x 37.5 cm (private collection)



Fig. 8. Emilio Vasarri, *At the bazaar*, no date, 74.2 x 57 cm

But the absolute champion of this genre is certainly Ettore Forti about whom nearly nothing is known, except that he was active in the years 1880-1920. He literarily specialized in this sub-genre, producing many variants for each of his compositions in a clear Pompeian context, with depiction of the Vesuvius in the background. Fig. 9-11 are just a few examples of his extensive production.



Fig. 9. Ettore Forti, *Il mercante di tappeti*, no date but likely to be after 1880
(sold by Bonhams on Sept. 29th, 2010)



Fig. 10. Ettore Forti, *At the antiquarian*, private coll.



Fig. 11. Ettore Forti, *The art lesson*, private coll.

It is noticeable that, in the examples provided above, the seller of antiquities is always a man and the buyer always a woman. Gender studies may easily find a way here along the line argued by Joseph A. Kestner: classical revival painting vehicles a strong reaction against gender claims, reaffirming the traditional roles attributed to women, the touch of frivolity included.³⁹ There is not only a gender dichotomy between sellers and buyers. It is furthermore noticeable that buyers are only young and beautiful women while sellers are mostly old and unattractive men. One is encouraged to recognize the old prevention of Christianity against money as a corrupting agent (think to the many depictions of money-lenders or of the allegory of *avaritia*).

The seller of antiquities as a subgenre has been rarely endorsed outside Italy. Jean-Léon Gérôme gave in the 1890s a Greek version which is a mix with another subgenre intensively practised by Alma-Tadema in the 1860s: to capture the ancient artist in his workshop. In *Painting Breathes Life into Sculpture*, he offers a unique view for which the painter, the seller and the buyers are all women (fig. 12).

³⁹ J. A. KESTNER, *Mythology and Mysogyny*, Maddison, 1989.



Fig. 12. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Painting Breathes Life into Sculpture*, 1893, Toronto
(© Art Gallery of Ontario)

Alma-Tadema himself never really pictured an art dealer scene, even if he sometimes went not too far as with *The flower market* which is depicting a presumably anachronistic street shop of a flower seller (fig. 13).



Fig. 13. Lourens Alma-Tadema, *The flower market*, 1868, Manchester
(© Manchester City Art Galleries)

In all these scenes of art selling, reproduced artworks could be unique pieces as the famous bronze statue of Augustus “Primaporta” (see Forti) but more often are common vases such as improbable fishplates too common to have been ever collected by the Roman elite. Chronological incongruities are plenty in these fanciful scenes but not to the point to go further than the Greco-Roman world. In that respect, *Il venditore d’antichità* is quite amazing, displaying a fascinating array of masterpieces coming from various horizons and cultures.

Identifying artworks reproduced by Capobianchi for *Il venditore d’antichità*

Trying to identify these objects is a quest – arguably a minor but trendy genre with a growing literature⁴⁰ – which also provides views on the tastes of the high society at the end of the 19th c. Let us first describe the general composition of *Il venditore d’antichità*, a complex painting with – nearly unique in that respect – the depiction of two clearly different actions on the same canvas (fig. 14).

The central part of the painting is occupied by a dealer behind his counter talking with an elegant lady likely to be of a high rank, accompanied by a girl and a boy, presumably her children. Seen from the back, she holds a small bronze statuette, a Nike, in her left hand and apparently is asking the price to the dealer who is answering with his fingers. The boy, from profile, is looking left to a peripheral scene: a slave (see his red bonnet) blacksmith repairing a bronze pot overturned. Above him is a wood tablet fixed in the wall with the inscription clearly referring to his work: Q. G. RVFVS / AFR. / CACAB. STANNI which in this context means: “Q. G. Rufus Africanus, tinker of bronze vases”. At the feet of the boy and attached to him by a leach, an ape is playing with a shining circular object which we would love to think is an ancient gold coin. Whatever the intentional meaning (to denounce the folly of the buyer, to mock himself as a numismatist or to make a discrete reference to the Via del Babuino [although the ape is not a baboon]), this is in itself an educated *procédé* with a long and well established tradition in art history, going back well before the famous painting *Le singe antiquaire* (1735) by Jean-Siméon Chardin (1699-1779).

⁴⁰ See e.g. I. JENKINS, “Frederic Lord Leighton and Greek vases”, *Burlington Magazine* 125 (Oct. 1983), p. 597-605; L. PETERSEN and N. ZWINGMANN, “Der Hildesheimer Silberfund im Werk des Malers Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema”, in M. Boetzkes and H. Stein (eds.), *Der Hildesheimer Silberfund. Original und Nachbildung. Vom Römerschatz zum Bürgerstolz*, Hildesheim, 1997, p. 231-241; M. LIVERSIDGE, “Living Alma-Tadema Pictures: *Hypatia* at the Haymarket Theatre”, in V. COLTMAN (ed.), *Making Sense of Greek Art*, Exeter, 2012, p. 155-178.



Fig. 14. *Il venditore d'antichità*

The work is built with two dominant points: a central area marked by the object of the sale, the small bronze Nike, intensely looked for by the two main characters, the buyer and the seller, and a perfect diagonal line which is starting with the repaired pot of the blacksmith at the bottom left and is going through the cane of the boy to end above with a theatrical mask which is likely to play a role in this social satyr of an unbalanced world where the high living standards of the elite in the center are made possible by the hard work of foreign slaves at the periphery.

a. The dagger of Kamose (?) (Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium)

Hanging on the white wall on the left, at a place which immediately captures the attention of the spectator, is a dagger which – while not exactly identical – is

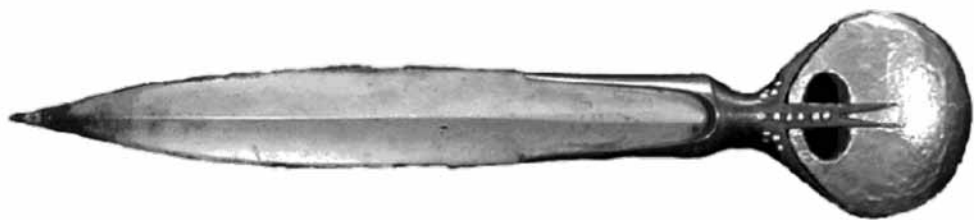


Fig. 15. Dagger of Kamose (Royal Library of Belgium, Lucien de Hirsch coll.)

This dagger – produced for a Pharaoh, excavated by no one else than Auguste Mariette in 1857 and owned among others by Prince Napoléon or the brothers Castellani – is today one of the most celebrated artworks of the Coin cabinet of the Royal Library of Belgium where it is kept in the Lucien de Hirsch's room, along with his coin collection, his library and his other antiquities. A recent article by Céline Ben Amar sums up the different aspects of this fascinating piece.⁴² The dagger was long kept by Prince Napoléon (Napoléon-Jérôme Bonaparte, 1822-1891) in his Parisian hotel, Avenue Montaigne, n° 18. Prince Napoléon sold part of his art collection in 1868 and 1872 but we are not informed about the fate of the dagger (the bracelet which was found along reappeared in 1881 when it was bought by the Louvre from the antique dealers Rollin & Feuardent). The dagger was finally bought by Lucien de Hirsch in Rome on March 24th, 1884, as part of the succession of the famous jeweller and antique dealer Alessandro Castellani (1823-1883). We are thus invited to think that the dagger may have been in Rome in 1879-1880 and that Capobianchi is likely to have reproduced it from his personal souvenir or sketch (hence maybe the small differences of drawing).

b. The Assyrian carpet on the wall (London, British Museum)

Also hanging on the wall but on the right part of the painting is a carpet with Assyrian motives. It is a combination of two sculptures in low relief: above, Sennacherib on his throne (ca. 700-692 BCE), a famous relief excavated in 1856 at Nineveh by John George Taylor and a highlight since then of the British Museum (fig. 16a-b).⁴³

⁴¹ I am grateful to Céline Ben Amar for this precision.

⁴² C. BEN AMAR, "The dagger of Pharaoh Kamose, the oldest glory of the Royal Library of Belgium," *In Monte Artium. Journal of the Royal Library of Belgium* 5 (2012), p. 45-67.

⁴³ British Museum, acquisition number: 1856.0909.14 (inv. 124910). See J.M. RUSSELL, *Sennacherib's palace without ri*, Chicago, 1991.



Fig. 16a. Capobianchi (detail)



Fig. 16b. Relief from Nineveh, London
(British Museum - © Mark Borisuk)

One finds below the even more famous wounded lioness (ca. 650 BCE) coming from the palace of the Neo-Assyrian king Ashurbanipal II (668-627 BCE), also acquired in 1856 from John George Taylor and excavated at Nimrud (fig. 17).⁴⁴

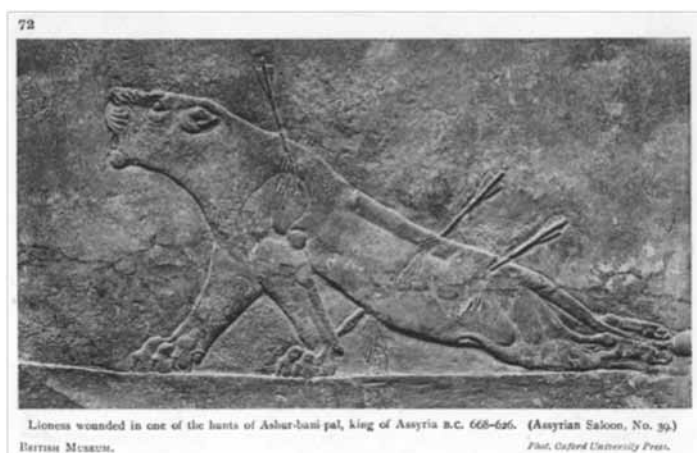


Fig. 17. The wounded lioness (British Museum – old postcard)

⁴⁴ British Museum, acquisition number: 1856.0909.15 (inv. 124955). I am grateful to Eugène Warmenbol, my colleague at the Université libre de Bruxelles, who easily identified these two well known prototypes.

It should be noted that these two pieces, although coming from different places, have received absolute contiguous inventory numbers at the British Museum: 1856.0909.14 and 1856.0909.15.

c. The Egyptian carpet on the counter (London, British Museum)

We stay at the British Museum with the Egyptian carpet put on the counter since the main scene on a red background is made with two detached fragments (inv. BM EA 37979 and BM EA 37982) of the tomb of Nebamun (ca. 1350 BCE) located at Dra Abu el-Naga in the Northern area of the noble tombs of the Theban necropolis and acquired by the British Museum in 1821 (fig. 18a-c).⁴⁵



Fig. 18a. Capobianchi (detail)

⁴⁵ I am grateful to Dimitri Laboury, université de Liège, who, excavating on the other side of the Theban necropolis, immediately recognized these scenes. On these paintings, see N. STRUDWICK, *Masterpieces of Ancient Egypt*, London, 2006, p. 174-175; R. PARKINSON, *The Painted Tomb-Chapel of Nebamun: Masterpieces of Ancient Egyptian Art in the British Museum*, London, 2008; A. MIDDLETON and K. UPRICHARD (eds.), *The Nebamun Wall paintings: Conservation, Scientific Analysis and Display at the British Museum*, London, 2008.



Fig. 18b. Egyptian relief
(British Museum, EA 37979)



Fig. 18c. Egyptian relief
(British Museum, EA 37982)

d. The Portland Vase (London, British Museum)



Fig. 19. The Portland Vase (from *The Penny Magazine*, 29 Sept. 1832)

However, today's most famous piece depicted on *Il venditore d'antichità* is no other than the Portland Vase.⁴⁶ Allegedly found at the end of the 16th century, described by Peiresc in 1633, this gigantic cameo vase long belonged to the Barberini family before being sold to William Hamilton in 1778. It was then bought in 1784 by the Duke of Portland and stayed in the family to be finally purchased in 1945 by the British Museum (fig. 19).

⁴⁶ British Museum, inv. GR 1945.9-27.1 - Gems 4036. See I. JENKINS and K. SLOAN, *Vases and Volcanoes: Sir William Hamilton and his collection*, London, 1996, p. 187-191; S. WALKER, *The Portland Vase*, London, 2004; K. PAINTER and D. WHITEHOUSE, "The History of the Portland Vase", *Journal of Glass Studies* 32 (1990), p. 24-84.

e. Bronze Silenus from Pompei (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale)

Vincenzo Capobianchi also included in his composition the famous bronze drunken Silenus as an oil lamp base, found in Pompei in 1863 (inv. NM 5628) and immediately reproduced as a suitable souvenir to be brought back home by the elite doing their Grand Tour (fig. 20a-b).⁴⁷



Fig. 20a. Capobianchi (detail)



Fig. 20b. Bronze Silenus (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale)
(Picture by Giorgio Sommer; private coll.)

This spectacular bronze sculpture already appears in *Greek wine* painted in 1873 by Lourens Alma-Tadema,⁴⁸ as well as in different versions of sellers done by Ettore Forti. Comparing how these artists reproduced this bronze group, it turns out that Capobianchi's version will certainly not appear as inferior to the others.

f. Silver cup from Pompeii (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale)

Also placed on the counter, is a richly decorated silver cup which is the one already reproduced by Giorgio Sommer (1834-1914) in his photographic catalogue

⁴⁷ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 5247.

⁴⁸ Alma-Tadema, *Greek wine*, Opus CXV, 1873, 17 x 35.5 cm (Mexico City, Perez Simon Collection, inv. 30912).

of the National Museum of Naples.⁴⁹ The cup is reputed to have been found in Pompeii during the years 1870-1880 (fig. 21a-b).



Fig. 21a. Capobianchi (detail)



Fig. 21b. Silver cup from Pompeii
(Picture by Giorgio Sommer; private coll.)

g. Caldron of the Bernardini tomb of Palestrina (Rome, Villa Giulia)

On the forefront of the counter, to the right of the silver cup, is a small Etruscan *lebes* adorned with five snake *protomes*. I am much indebted to Valentino Nizzo and Simona Sanchirico for its identification. By its shape (13.5 x 16 cm) and its extremely shining colour, it is indeed to be identified with the silver caldron (*lebes*) found in the Bernardini tomb of Palestrina, dated from the second quarter of the 7th c. BCE, and now exhibited at the Villa Giulia in Rome (fig. 22).⁵⁰ Found in 1876, the “corredo” of that tomb immediately prompted a raging debate – not closed yet – about the possible belonging to the same tomb of the “fibula prenestina”. It should be noticed, as added by Nizzo and Sanchirico, that the brothers Castellani were very active with the antiquities coming from the Palestrina area, and that Alessandro Castellani was even asked by the Italian government to give his advice about the Bernardini tomb. After the dagger of Kamose, this caldron provides us with a second case of the apparent proximity between Capobianchi and the Castellani’s.

⁴⁹ G. SOMMER, *Museo archeologico nazionale di Napoli (s.l.s.d.)*, inv. 25376-25377. “Bicchieri d’argento (di fattura romana, provenienti dagli scavi di Pompei). Numero di catalogo: 7553. ca. 1870/80”.

⁵⁰ M. TORELLI (ed.), *The Etruscans*, Rome, 2001.



Fig. 22. Caldron of the Bernardini tomb, Rome
(© Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia, inv. F3 686)

h. Statue of "Attis" (Florence, Uffizi)

Emerging from the dark of the inner shop, one recognizes the 3rd c. CE colossal statue of Attis restored in 1712 as a barbarian king (the head), now displayed at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence and since long the possession of the Medici.⁵¹ But whereas the original is a colossal marble sculpture, its bronze replica has been here downsized (fig. 23).



Fig. 23b. Sculpture of Attis,
Florence
(Uffizi, inv. 1914, nr. 84)

⁵¹ Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi, Corridoio primo, Parete 3 (see G.A. MANSUELLI, *Galleria degli Uffizi. Le sculture*, 1, Rome, 1958, p. 170).

i. Other objects on the counter

The two other pieces put on the counter are harder to identify precisely (fig. 24). Starting from left to right, one recognizes: 1) a Hellenistic plastic vase (*askos*) from the Canosa group painted with flashy colours,⁵² and 2) an undecorated jug of red ware lacking distinctive characteristics. Finally, the elegant buyer is holding in her left hand a gilded Nike extending her right arm and holding a spear in her left.



Fig. 24. *Il venditore d'antichità* (detail)

⁵² See e.g. F. VAN DER WIELEN-VAN OMMEREN, "Vases with polychrome and plastic decoration from Canosa, in Italian Iron Age Artefacts in the British Museum", in J. SWADDLING (ed.), *Sixth British Museum Classical Colloquium*, London, 1986, p. 215-226.

Conclusion

Considering the extraordinary diversity of the exhibited pieces reproduced here (4 at least for ancient Rome, 2 for ancient Egypt, 2 for Mesopotamia, 1 at least for ancient Greece and 1 for Etruria), two comments may be offered.

First, there is every reason to suspect that this unmatched and impossible range of pieces is intentional and cannot be attributed to pure ignorance on the part of the painter. Having grown up in the antique shop of his father, acquainted with antiquities since childhood, Capobianchi is likely to have been the most educated painter in terms of connoisseurship of all those who endorse the classical revival.

Secondly, most of the reproduced pieces, except the Portland Vase and the so-called “Attis” of the Uffizi, were rather new artworks for art historians at the time of the painting.⁵³ This is not without importance as François de Polignac has accurately argued: there is a difference between paintings reproducing only masterworks admired since generations (“*Le rêve*”) and others only displaying freshly discovered pieces with an impact on our taste and knowledge of ancient art (“*La science*”).⁵⁴ Of course, Capobianchi could not ignore the historical impossibility of such a mix, which could never have been gathered at one time and at the same place in Rome or Pompeii. What he is offering is more a constructed vision of antiquarianism dealing with freshly discovered artworks now two millennium ago.

As testified by his other productions and his biographical data, it would be hard to see the Roman, well established and internationally connected Capobianchi as championing a political issue or delivering subversive messages through his paintings. To use the classification of Luna Figurelli, he certainly was more “umbertist” than – if even at all – “spartacist”.

However, *Il venditore d'antichità* stands as a unique attempt to broaden the narrow limits of classical antiquity both in regards to space and chronology as well as in terms of forged tastes. Beyond the lovely scène de genre with its impeccable and near photographic realism appealing to the high society, one is confronted with an image of absolute Roman grandeur where a modest street art dealer could propose for sale the debris of millenary civilizations which ultimately all

⁵³ 1821: the two reliefs of Nebamun at Dra Abu el-Naga; 1856: Sennacherib relief of Niniveh and the wounded lioness of Nimrud; 1857: dagger of Kamose; 1863: drunken Silenus from Pompei; 1870-1880: silver cup from Pompeii; 1876: caldron of Palestrina.

⁵⁴ F. de POLIGNAC, “Rome redécouverte, Rome réinventée: l’Antiquité entre le rêve et la science”, in J. RASPI SERRA and F. de POLIGNAC (eds.), *La fascination de l’Antique 1700-1770. Rome redécouverte, Rome inventée*, Lyon, 1998, p. 10-17. The comparison is between the *Galerie de vues de la Rome antique* (Paris, Louvre) painted about 1754 by Giovanni Paolo Pannini, and *Charles Townley et des amis dans sa galerie de Park Street, Westminster* (Townley Hall Art Gallery and Museums) painted by Johan Zoffany in 1781-1783.

converged to Italy, and at the same time with a denunciation of that grandeur and its center-periphery predatory logic. The African slave is laboring in a corner while the elite could buy the illusion of an allegorical victory, causing no disturbance to the monkey who is likely to play with a gold *aureus*.

The complexity and the high level of understanding that this painting requires ultimately leads to argue that *Il venditore d'antichità* is possibly the most scholarly work ever produced by neo-Pompeian painting.

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